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ABSTRACT

A course in Renaissance theatre offered within the general studies curriculum at Rhode Island College introduced students to the field of Jacobean and Elizabethan drama and to the dramatic arts, provided opportunities for students to help produce and act in scenes from several plays, and revealed to them the importance of vivid and detailed writing (through their journal entries describing and criticizing rehearsals and performances). This paper discusses the course in detail and with examples, including a profile of the college student body; the method of approach, which recognized that most of the students were majoring in fields other than English or speech/theatre; the professor's role as discussion leader, critic, and guide; the evaluation of performances using videotape; and the students' achievements as well as their reactions to the course. (JM)

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Renaissance Theatre in a General Education Program

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Three years ago at a New England Renaissance Society Conference, one of the main topics of casual conversation was the falling enrollment in Renaissance courses. The gist of these discussions was that unless the Renaissance has a rebirth among students, it may disappear in many colleges. The lively culture of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries remains on every liberal arts campus where choral groups sing madrigals and theatre groups present performances of Shakespeare. But these are special events, separated from the daily life of the average student in colleges that emphasize the culture of contemporary society--no Latin, no Greek, and little Shakespeare. Because of our conviction that saturation in the Renaissance imagination is of value to all students, we developed a course called "Experiments in Renaissance Theatre" as part of our college's General Studies curriculum.[1]

Teaching assignments in college general education programs are a great part of the work of most faculties of language and literature today. It seems sensible then that we should develop methods of using our fields of greatest competence to teach the skills of writing and speaking to the general student. As a result, we may be able to continue to work in our areas of specialization as well as to awaken student interest in these specialties. "Experiments in Renaissance Theatre" opened the field of Elizabethan and Jacobean drama to some students who had never heard those words and to some who might not have been able to read or to pronounce them. By the end of the course, every student had helped to produce a scene from several plays and had also acted in them. In addition, students had learned the importance of vivid, detailed writing by keeping diaries in which they had described rehearsals and performances and criticized them in terms of secondary sources they had read.

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The course not only opened the Renaissance to the people who are what John Hurt Fisher calls "our new clientele,"[2] it also offered students an opportunity to become acquainted with dramatic arts. Although in past English courses, teachers have made fine distinctions between the narrative technique and the dramatic, the differentiation assumes that students have a rough knowledge of the meaning of the words "story" and "play." However, teachers who listen carefully to student-centered discussions may hear unwelcome news. When groups of students are asked to choose a play for discussion, they may in fact bring a short story to class. Not only have students never read plays, they often have never been to a professional performance; some have also never seen or appeared in any school production. The theatre could indeed become the archaic art that some film "buffs" say it is, unless we as teachers begin to create a lively audience for modern theatre companies by acknowledging that we must teach "our new clientele" what a play is and how their sensitivities can be increased by enjoyment of dramatic arts.

Like students in many colleges, the students at Rhode Island College are primarily the first generation of their family to be college-educated, and they are limited in verbal ability.[3] We see the consequences of these facts in the students' difficulty with articulation of ideas in both writing and speech. Poorer than the mean of four-year college students, many Rhode Island College students must combine working with commuting, and they have little time for study in strange and difficult fields. As a result, in introductory drama courses they often greet their first assignment in Shakespeare with hostility. Yet these same students in "Experiments in Renaissance Theatre" not only read Elizabethan and Jacobean plays, they enjoyed them.

Our course was offered to two different sets of students in two consecutive semesters--in the spring of 1974 and again in the fall of 1974. Because the course was part of the General Studies curriculum, only one of thirty-four

students in the two semesters was an English major and only three were majors in Speech/Theatre, the others specialized in medical technology, mathematics, social studies, special education, psychology, art, French, music, elementary education, and industrial arts. Their variety of intellectual interests meant not only that some were reading English Renaissance plays for the first time but also that some brought into the course very little previous experience at reading sophisticated literature and writing about it.

For students with so little background or interest in literature, the best way to teach dramatic arts is in the active and creative participation of students and faculty in workshop-courses that can demonstrate aesthetic and critical theories in practice. By throwing inexperienced students into the midst of the problems of theatrical production and forcing them to discover a solution, we can--through criticism and discussion of the solution--explore the theories and principles which form the foundation of theatre arts. At the same time we can awaken in them an enjoyment of drama. The method of approach that we use in "Experiments in Renaissance Theatre" was to encourage the students to study a play by themselves in spite of its apparently difficult vocabulary and sentence structure, and then to experiment with the staging of scenes in such a way as to bring the meaning of the script to life for themselves and for a contemporary audience. This experimentation sometimes resulted in variations of dialogue, setting, costumes or audience placement, but we urged the students to be true to the intent of the playwright. We stressed elements of theatre production as well as the dramatic structure of the plays for four reasons. First, acquaintance with all aspects of the theatre will encourage students, even those who lack theatrical talent, to appreciate dramatic arts and to become a mature theatre audience. Second, engagement in production is the best way to help students to visualize the drama and to begin to think of it as plays that are acted, not just as scripts that are read. Third, the

process of producing a play and the growth of a student's understanding of the author's intentions are interrelated. Enlarged understanding of a script and the preparation of a production is a spiraling process that is especially appropriate to the study of plays written in a language as difficult for contemporary students as is Elizabethan English.[4] Finally, in a theatre-workshop each difficulty that arises can be the source of new insights into the play and into the theatre arts.

In each semester that we taught "Experiments in Renaissance Theatre," we subdivided the class into smaller producing groups--with seven students in each group. After discussion of Renaissance theatre companies, we suggested that each group think of itself as a miniature theatre company and plan five- to ten-minute performances from the assigned plays. In the five scenes performed, the students divided the labor among themselves. They decided who would direct the scene and coordinate each production, who would act, and who would be stage manager. We required that the stage manager construct miniature promptbooks for each performance, due on the day of performance.[5] Since these various duties were rotated throughout the semester, each student had a variety of opportunities to learn the work of all members of a theatre company.

The theatre companies met in class for two hours, two days a week. Of course, the more they rehearsed outside of class, the better performances they gave, and some were remarkable indeed. The college scheduled our class the first semester in two small rehearsal rooms and a small theatre, ideal for arena performances and with all the lights and dimmers that anyone needed for imaginative productions. But the second semester we were assigned a rigid proscenium stage with few lights and no dimming system. The students met this difficulty creatively. For example, the director of a performance of scenes from John Lyly's Gallathea brought a few portable lights to that stage

to enhance the other-worldliness of the spectacle of Diana's nymph running from Cupid, and at the performance of John Ford's 'Tis Pity She's a Whore, the audience sat on the stage at the edge of the violent action. Even in this amateur production, we felt that we were drawn out of this world and out of ourselves into the stage action as participants. The action on stage, however, seemed like reality, not fiction.

With each new production, enthusiasm grew, and the theatre companies began to compete against each other to perfect their performances, even though we tried to discourage competition. As could be expected, the rivalry sometimes caused groups to out-perform themselves, but there were other times when it was detrimental because it occasioned overly critical responses to each other's performances. The competition was so intense at times that they seemed only to hear our criticism and not our praise. In both semesters, we found that a particular group which felt attacked by another would become so defensive that we had our own War of the Theatres. Naturally, we used the occasion to discuss historic rivalry between companies and the role of competition in artistic achievement. Several times students suggested that we rotate students from group to group or establish new groups for each new unit in order to avoid the growth of rivalry. We vetoed this suggestions, however, because we had found in previous theatre workshops that it sometimes takes two units or more for group rapport to be established and the group to become effective as a production ensemble.

In addition to the requirement that each student take an active role in his theatre company, we also required the students to write individual journals about their experiences. In describing this assignment to the students, we specifically required discussion of the plays both as literature and performance. We stressed that each log should contain in-depth discussion of the

assigned play, that it should use at least two secondary sources per unit, and that it should record the student's responses to class discussions and to rehearsals and performances from the point of view of an active participant and of a member of the audience. Naturally, the students displayed varying degrees of sophistication in their journals. For the one English major in the course, the log became a detailed criticism of each play. She discussed, for example, V.A. Kolve's essay, "Everyman and the Parable of the Talents."[6] Her reading called attention to financial metaphors as sustaining the theme of the play through the poetry, and these ideas became relevant to the play as she directed it. The other students read more general critical materials, but the final journals were all informative by the end of the course, and showed that students had increased their writing ability as well as their understanding of both the Renaissance and the theatre. Students, whose first entries were simply brief records of their personal movements, at the end of the course were writing vivid, detailed anecdotal accounts of rehearsals. Those who at first totally ignored the play as literature learned to compare their own ideas of the drama with those of scholars and to arrive at their own conclusions, and as they learned more, they rewrote their earlier entries to improve their sentence structure and use of detail. Some also had to learn the difference between fact and opinion. In rewriting their logs, some students, whose disciplines did not require stylistic revisions and whose previous work was primarily concerned with facts, were unfamiliar with the distinction between criticism of their style and a difference of opinion about content. For example, one student who praised a performance in the first unit of her log, criticized it in her revision because we had disagreed with her in the margins. Thus, some students learned for the first time that in the arts, opinions often differ. We required the journals to be completed after each unit--or approximately every two and one-half weeks. At the end

of the course, the logs varied in length from fifteen to forty typewritten pages, but they all showed a growth in understanding of the theatre and in writing skills. In marking the students, we valued these journals as fifty per cent of the work of the course. The other half of their grade was determined by their diligence and improvement in theatrical productions.

In the theatrical performances, our emphasis was always placed upon the educational process rather than upon a polished "professional production." We did not emphasize, for example, stage diction or Renaissance English dialects. Instead, we tried to stress correct modern pronunciation and clear articulation. Nor did we require memorization of the text but left that decision to the producing groups. Our aim was that the students develop enough familarity with the text so that the scripts that they carried would not intrude upon the rhythm or dramatic flow of the scene and so that the author's intent could be communicated.

Each semester at the beginning of the course, the students were very uneasy about the Renaissance English in which the plays were written. They displayed their ill-ease by both evasion and innovation. The first semester that we taught the course, one theatre company confronted with the assignment to produce a scene from Gammer Gurton's Needle, spent an inordinate amount of time trying to locate a modernized version of the play by Raymond Picozzi which had been produced on campus the year before. The other two groups, dealing with medieval Noah and Crucifixion plays rewrote the familiar stories in contemporary language. The group presenting Noah worked from a contemporized scenario, improvising the lines as they performed--like a latter-day commedia troupe. They maintained the conventional arguments between Noah and his wife but added modern scepticism to Mrs. Noah's traditional contempt for her husband. Noah's Wife asked why, if God were so powerful, did he not

build the boat himself? They also characterized Noah's Wife as a woman of questionable virtue. The result was to maintain the traditional alienation between the audience and Noah's Wife in spite of the innovative production. They also increased audience sympathy for Noah, beleaguered by a contemptuous wife and by the improbabilities to which he committed himself, by staging a delightful solo dance of faith for Noah as he awaited the flood. The group performing The Crucifixion rewrote it in the vernacular of the '70's with one interesting exception: The Renaissance dialogue was retained for the speeches of Jesus in order to accentuate his difference from the soldiers. The Roman soldiers, clad in military khaki, were chilling as they led Jesus to the cross. His innocence was emphasized by his naked torso, in contrast to their uniforms. These innovations, which increased their confidence in their own production abilities, were also effective dramatically, but they were clearly a sign of the students' discomfort with a Renaissance English script.

Therefore, the second semester that we taught the course, we lessened the students' fear of language by requiring them to make a recording of a play as the first assignment so that they could concentrate on language alone. This class made no attempt in any unit to make gross changes in script. Their discomfort with moving into an earlier period of history was shown instead by their insistence on modernizing their first productions, Everyman and Volpone. The director of Everyman was the English student. In her journal she later questioned her own decision to place God behind a desk on stage throughout the play, conducting "the business of the universe." She records in her journal that F.C.Canfield in The Craft of Play Directing recommends a distinctive approach or different design[7] when reviving an old play. She found however that her "attempt at a 'new look' turned into too much of a novelty." She criticizes her own use of gimmicks, such as a tape recorder that interrupted the action with modern foreign language appeals to God. Another student, a psychology major who played the part of God in this produc-

tion, noted in her log that from reading T.W. Craik's The Tudor Interlude[8] she learned that our student production had by accident developed similarities to a Tudor production. The students had dressed God as a police chief, a figure of authority today, just as the Tudor God was dressed like an Emperor or Pope. The Tudor God carried a sceptre, while the student God carried a billy-club, the "modern sceptre." From her critical reading, the same student learned that medieval productions probably placed Heaven stage right and Hell on the left, exactly the setting that the students used. She remarks, "Much of the symbolism came naturally to us, which is an interesting comment on the nature of religious sentiment and its symbolism."

The similarities that the students noted between contemporary religious sentiment and Renaissance expressions of belief demonstrate that we need not have feared that the themes of Renaissance plays would be too remote for modern students. An industrial arts major with severe reading and writing problems explained very clearly in his journal's most articulate section that although his group clad Death in white, rather than in the Tudor black, and although they conceived of him as a jiving, third-world personality, they too were trying to communicate the frightening remoteness of Death.[9]

In another modernized production, Volpone, the characters resembled Mafia figures because, as a mathematics major who played Corbaccio explained in her journal, "Since almost everyone saw The Godfather, everyone could relate to it." We saw more difference than similarity between the comic characters in Volpone and those in the violent Godfather, but the student's journal explained that both groups of people had a common motivation. They would do anything for riches, including exploiting each other, and in addition, both hide lust and greed behind a facade of respectability. Her insight into the similarity between Jacobean and modern characters was confirmed when Pauline Kael in The New Yorker recently described the human relationships of Godfather II as "worked out with a Jacobean splendor...."[10]

The first time that we taught the course, we required that each group present as a final project a free public production which was supposed to combine two or more portions from their previous performances. This assignment was intended to be a culminating experience in which the students could perfect some of the scenes they had originally performed and also confront in a unified and creative way some of the similar thematic implications of the diverse scripts. Although we were astounded by one final performance when Grandma of Albee's The American Dream left the stage in the arms of the devil from Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay, we decided that such ingenuity came at too heavy a cost. Because most of the students had no professional interest in the stage, they were reluctant to rehearse until they were perfect and instead were eager to work on another play. The repetitive rehearsing of familiar scenes for a thirty-to forty-minute performance seemed to create tension and anxiety in contrast to the enthusiastic rehearsals for previous ten- to twenty-minute presentations. In their anxiety, they attempted productions that were too elaborate for the minimal amount of rehearsal time available, and the results were simply careless. At the performance, lights were lowered and raised at the wrong time, characters missed their cues, and finally one director, angry at this desecration of his grandiose plans, stopped the performance to shout at a member of his crew. To prevent the reoccurrence of such chaos, the second time we offered the course we made the mistake of omitting all public performance. As a result, the course seemed to lack a suitable conclusion. We found that the students need some culminating experience as an incentive to integrate the ideas and implications of the whole semester. Nonetheless, it is evident that for the course to accomplish its broad goals of using the theatre as a way to improve the communication skills of even those students who normally have difficulty reading, speaking, and writing, teachers should counteract the urge to produce a polished production on stage. The emphasis must remain on general

education, not public performance.

This course was so successful that it amuses us now to think that the first semester that we offered it we decided to intersperse modern drama with Renaissance plays because we feared that Elizabethan language would exhaust students who had never read a Tudor play. To give them a period of relief, we combined modern plays and Elizabethan plays that were similar in theme.[11] We learned from the journals that we misjudged the students. It was the modern plays that exhausted them. They were bored by all the talk in Ugo Betti's modern revenge tragedy, Crime on Goat Island, but enjoyed standing on the scaffold that they had built for their production of Thomas Kyd's The Spanish Tragedy. The imaginative staging necessary for a successful Renaissance play was so satisfying to them that they suggested to us that we leave out the modern plays the next time that we taught the course. Therefore, the second semester we followed the students' suggestion; but this change, like the complete omission of a culminating presentation, was also a mistake. We now think that the students' appreciation of the Renaissance was caused in part by the contrast of plays. For example, the static characters, lounging in hell hating each other, in Sartre's No Exit emphasized the vitality of Marlowe's Dr. Faustus, who travels among colorfully robed Popes and Cardinals and who kisses Helen of Troy. In addition, the students noted that the magic potions used to bring a boy friend downstairs in van Druten's Bell, Book, and Candle were routine and trivial when compared to the magic glass, or perspective, which is placed at the disposal of a lover anxious to master immense distances of time and space in Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay. Students commented that the variety of characters and the distances travelled in each of the Renaissance plays gives an impression of a vast and complex universe that had been captured on stage magically, as by a glass perspective, whereas the three characters conversing in one room in some modern plays create an impression of a simple world whose only complications are caused by its population of perplexed human beings.

Comparison of the plays is itself of great importance in aiding the students to relate to an earlier period of history. We observed, for example, similarities in the sources of humor in both ages. In both Gammer Gurton's Needle and The American Dream, the characters are humiliated by dependence on their material possessions. Just as the loss of a needle causes a series of misunderstandings that convulse the audience of Gammer, in The American Dream we laugh at the vulnerability of characters who live with a leaky toilet and who can package their whole lives in small boxes. Thus, we found in both plays that human reliance on the material world results in comic absurdity.

We also noted that although Everyman and Death of a Salesman are different types of plays, both plays present the waste of a life devoted to transcient financial success and social popularity. We discussed the ways in which Betti's Crime on Goat Island resembled Kyds The Spanish Tragedy in presenting the destruction caused by personal hatred, although in the modern play the suffering is confined to the main characters, while in the Renaissance play, evil spreads beyond individual characters to whole kingdoms. This type of comparative study emphasized for the students that the past is not as remote as it might have seemed when they first opened their texts.

In both semesters that we have taught this course, we found that as the students began to identify with the problems raised by Renaissance playwrights, their performances became more traditional. Even with so difficult a dramatist as John Lyly, they managed to capture the balanced rhythms and convey the meaning of his Euphuistic prose. One of the most gratifying experiences of the course was to observe how the humorous sub-plot in Gallathea appealed to its director, the industrial arts major with severe reading problems. By some inexplicable miracle of the theatre, he guided his cast into stressing Lyly's

contrasts between earth and sky, mortal and divine, and the sublime and the ridiculous, when he directed a grandiloquent astronomer to point to the sky as a ruse to distract a naive page from a rich-looking purse on the ground.

Because of their ease with Elizabethan words by the end of our first semester, students were able to perform Dr. Faustus with all the magical effects that fire-crackers and the smoke of dry-ice could create. At that performance we laughed and screamed as raucously as any Renaissance audience. The prop list included: a wand, a chalice, a bell, a candle, a skull, hooves, wings, charts, scrolls, crosses, a pike, a ceremonial sword, alchemist's accessories, and a "a feast." The director, a geography major who had had some experience backstage, used Renaissance texts to find his magic circle and to find the model for his stage demon. To increase the aura of magic, he combined stage action with the moving shadows of film and slides that he had photographed in the woods near our campus with costumed students acting out the seven deadly sins. The deceptiveness of sin was effectively embodied in the unreality of the images flashing on the screen.

In the performance of John Ford's 'Tis Pity She's a Whore, the students' new ease with the language permitted them to play their roles in a manner that can even be described as flamboyant, as they moved off the stage to gain for Soranzo a brutal distance through which he could drag a screaming Annabella. They even tried to express the complexity of Annabella's feelings as she justifies her pregnancy to her bridegroom.

The dramatic effect of these productions was not at all reduced by those students who found our bi-weekly units too brief for complete memorization of scripts. Often, the scripts that they carried could be used as part of characterization. For example, Knowledge and Confession in Everyman, Dr. Faustus

in Marlowe's play, and Annabella in the garden scene of Ford's 'Tis Pity She's a Whore, all carried books or scrolls as part of the director's concept of the character. In general, however, we established the presence of a book as one of our theatrical conventions even where characterization did not require it.

A second convention we adopted was the use of women to play male roles since most of the students enrolled in the course were women.[12] At first the students thought of inviting men not enrolled in the course to perform in scenes when necessary, but when they learned that in the Renaissance men and boys played both male and female roles, they decided to experiment with the situation reversed. In most instances, costuming and make-up were used effectively, and the convention became acceptable within the framework of the course. While studying Lyly's Gallathea, however, one group toyed with the idea of casting a husky industrial arts major in the title role. We discouraged this experiment by questioning whether such casting would detract from the fantasy of the main plot and reduce the difference between the types of comedy that are used in the two plots.

Thus, when team-teaching in workshops, every occasion can be used by faculty of literature and faculty of theatre to stress the complexities of both text and production. The professors' role in this learning context is a combination of discussion leader, critic, and guide. In our course, the English professor was responsible for informal lectures on the conventions of Renaissance theatre and on Renaissance intellectual currents. The professor of theatre gave lectures on directing and on theatre production. Both shared the role of critic during the rehearsals and after performances because both share an interest in exploring dramatic literature and theatrical techniques. We provided some orientation at the beginning of the study of each play, but in effect each "theatre company" worked independently--discussing the play, choosing the scenes to be presented, and assigning roles and production responsibilities.

As might be expected, there were directorial and acting problems throughout the semester because of the students' lack of previous experience. It was often difficult to sit quietly and watch the students struggle to block their movements on stage. Another perpetual difficulty was to emphasize transitions within a scene--from one mood to another or from one idea to another. But usually after the students tried a few alternative solutions, they were able to resolve the problems satisfactorily. Most of the beginning directors learned quickly the time-saving value of studying the scene before class and planning tentative blocking which could then be modified through work with actors. Usually, transitions of mood were effective only to the degree that the director and actors had discussed how to communicate the change to the audience. The best directors spent quite a bit of time on these details but when the directors seemed at a loss, some of the more intuitive and creative actors came to the rescue. Thus, the students made their own decisions; we intervened only when it seemed evident that gross misinterpretations were going to occur. Although we divided our time between groups, observing group discussions and rehearsals that were held in class-time, we made suggestions only when necessary. During rehearsals we would make notations of our criticisms and then give these notes to the director, who could decide whether to use them, and how to implement them in subsequent rehearsals. Our notes would raise specific questions about setting, about the movement of characters, pronunciation, or articulation. We would ask the meaning of a specific line, how it differed from the previous line, and how the director could communicate that to the audience. Even if the director had been working on these difficulties, a corroborating word from one of the professors became an added incentive to improve the scene by correcting specific details.

We stressed the need for everyone to read the whole play carefully before beginning to rehearse the scene the group had selected, but we found that poor ability

to read prevented a few students from detailed prior planning. Even they, however, seemed to gain from our lack of interference. Although we cannot explain the process of interaction between the director, his actors, and John Lyly's Renaissance imagination, as we saw the comic sub-plot of Gallathea develop into a unified performance under the direction of the student with a severe reading problem we felt a rare wonder and awe. More importantly, the student too recognized that he had taken a difficult script and had shown fellow-students that it was a very funny play. The confidence he gained from hearing audience laughter in response to his work could not be equalled by receiving any professor's guidance or praise.

In each unit, the directors met with common problems. Each director had to cope with one irresponsible student who delayed productions by absence, lateness, or unwillingness to study. The solution we found was the old one; we gave low grades. The credit -no credit option, which exists at Rhode Island College and which theoretically is ideal in an evaluation of the inexperienced, actually in practice encouraged a few students to give as little as they could to their groups.

An unexpected problem arose because of the enrollment in the course of a few majors in Speech/Theatre and others who had some previous experience in amateur theatrical productions. These students were a mixed blessing. On the one hand, they were fine resource people, and we therefore tried to make certain that each group included one of them. They were also imaginative, creative, energetic, and enthusiastic about the performances and production elements of the scenes presented. At times, however, they caused conflict when they assumed the mantle of "authority" and undermined their director. They also often desired a degree of "perfection" and "professionalism" which was unattainable for most of those enrolled in the course. While their criticisms

of their peers was usually incisive, it was often also so cutting that we had to counsel some of them on the most helpful way to offer suggestions.

We scheduled the formal evaluation of performances to take place immediately after the presentation of the scenes in each unit. Since most of the students were not accustomed to the public exposure that defines a stage appearance, all criticism became a delicate operation. They had exposed to criticism not only their understanding of a character or a scene, but also their bodily movement and vocal timbre. They had also invested a large amount of time, energy, and self-esteem in ridding themselves of inhibitions. Thus, the emotional involvement in any performance by students who had never displayed themselves in this way should not be underestimated. They were sometimes sure that their production had been a complete and flawless success until we pointed out its failings, or sometimes they were convinced that they had been failures in spite of all their commitment, and in that case our criticisms were even more cutting. Indeed, the difference in the emotional climate of these theatre workshop- classes and that of a conventional discussion class is enormous. Students would occasionally snap and scream at each other in anguish over their inability to perform properly or in frustration over each other's irresponsibility. We think that such variety of emotion is perhaps present in all classes but controlled by the conventions of discussion and lecture. The same fear that is released in stage performances may cause a student in other types of classes to absent himself or to remain silent in a discussion or even to read a newspaper during a lecture. If we are correct, it becomes imperative that teachers discover ways to enable students to release tensions and objectify anxiety.

The method that we used was to make a videotape of each of our student productions. Seeing their own performances helped the students to be more objective about their work. In fact, we found videotape to be such an effective tool that we now use it to record oral reports in other classes. The tapes enabled the

students to observe their own strengths and failures as they would those of a third party. They could see on the tape the very moment when they had turned their backs to the audience, and they could also hear how their own lack of articulation affected the play. We could stop the videotape to prove to them the importance of attention to the individual words of the text. Thus, once when a line had suggested that they should be above the stage, and they saw themselves below it on the videotape, their own experience proved to them the need for careful and close reading of the text. The videotapes were invaluable also to demonstrate their improvement. The students did not have to take our word that their speech was clearer and their understanding of the parts more mature; they could compare two performances that they had seen. For example, one young man who had barked his way through Hodge's lines in his first performance in Gammer Gurton's Needle, later heard himself as a sympathetic and moving Everyman. Another student, a recent immigrant, read the lines of his first performance as if they were sentences in a child's primer. As a contrast, his concluding performance was an expressive reading of Lyly's difficult, balanced dialogue.

There was, in fact, a steady achievement of the goals of the course. While reading and writing problems continued throughout the course, the logs show that all the students learned to use vivid words in detailed descriptions of their roles. From the perspective of stage-craft, some problems of projection and articulation also occurred even at the end of the course. Yet it was clear that as the semester passed and the students become more familiar with the language, they spent more time making certain that they understood what they were saying, and they became less inhibited and self-conscious. In fact, there seemed to be correlation between the degree of self-confidence on stage and the improvement of projection and clarity of articulation.

The success of the course was not only in vocal articulation and writing, but in the way that groups of students who did not know each other at the start of the course learned to encourage each other, to handle competitiveness, and to evaluate performance with greater objectivity. Although two students indicated negative reactions in their evaluation of the course, anyone who visited the class could see that most were enjoying each other and the Renaissance theatre. While it is true that student evaluations can be misleading and misinterpreted at times, the students indicated that they were inclined to have "a more positive attitude toward the subject matter at the conclusion of the course than they had at the outset." Even more significant than these evaluations, perhaps, was the observable change in almost all the participants in the course--from apprehension and inhibition at the beginning of the semester to overt enthusiasm and enjoyment.

Their enjoyment of the experience assures us that, given the opportunity, professors of Renaissance literature and professors of the theatre can aid the development of general education programs while continuing to work in their own fields. Indeed, we each found that working together in "Experiments in Renaissance Theatre" aided us as faculty members to increase our insights into our specializations. In general education courses, the professional urge toward perfection in theatrical performance and in every detail of scholarship must be integrated with the student need to understand the relevance of the culture of the past to their lives today and ultimately must be subsumed by the fundamental need of students to expand their ability to communicate.[14]

Notes

[1]In an attempt to meet the needs of our urban student body, Rhode Island College has revised its general education requirements. As the present time there are two basic components to General Studies courses at the college. There are the Freshman Colloquia, in which emphasis is placed on class discussion of assigned readings, analysis of ideas, communication skills, and also the encouragement of critical thinking. Each year the faculty is also encouraged to design seminars in which juniors and seniors can meet with students and faculty outside their major. In these seminars the students attempt to construct and evaluate solutions to specific problems which may be of concern to specialists in more than one discipline.

[2]John Hurt Fisher as quoted in MLA Newsletter, December 1974, p. 4, in a condensation of "Crisis in English Writing," Chronicle of Higher Education, September 23, 1974.

[3]Profile of Students at Rhode Island College

42% work 15-35 hours a week
14% live on campus
54% commute 10 miles or less
32% commute 11-100 miles
70% work part-time (57% national norm Masters level institutions)
42% expect to attend grad. school in fall after graduation (34% national norm)
48% plan professional study in education (5% national norm)
71% worked part-time (57% national norm)
7% fathers college graduates (14% national norm)
20% fathers completed 8th grade or less (15% national norm)
14% mothers college graduates (15% national norm)
18% mothers completed 8th grade or less (10% national norm)
55% income less than $12,000 (39% national norm)
96% white, Caucasian (87% national norm four-year college)
75% Roman Catholic (31% four-year college national norm)
98% native-born (95% four-year college national norm)
17% above 550, verbal SAT
20% 500-549, verbal SAT
Median verbal SAT: 470 (445 national norm)

Sources of these statistics are reports from the Office of Counseling Services, Rhode Island College, entitled A Profile on Entering Freshman, 1972, A Profile of Entering Freshman, 1973, Rhode Island College Senior Survey, November 1972, Student Census, 1974; in addition, John S. Foley, A Profile Report on New Students, 1973.

We wish to thank Patricia A. Sullivan of the Office of Student Life, Rhode Island College, for gathering these reports for us, and J. Eugene Knott, Director, Rhode Island College, Counseling Center, and John S. Foley, Director of Admissions, Rhode Island College, for their cooperation.

[4]At the MLA seminar at which part of this paper was read, foreign language teachers spoke of the need to renew the Renaissance practice of teaching language through theatre.

[5]Prompt books contained the script for the scene presented; blocking diagrams placed opposite the page of dialogue, noting movement and stage directions; motivational notations in the margins of the script or beside the blocking diagram; production ideas, including the overall concept, plan, and style; the floor plan of the set design; the prop list; lighting cues, sound cues; special effects; costume list and/or drawings; and make-up notations and/or drawings.

[6]V. A. Kolve, "Everyman and the Parable of the Talents," The Medieval Drama, ed. Sandra Sticca (Albany, 1972.)

[7]Fayette Curtis Canfield, The Craft of Play Directing (New York, 1963) p. 8.

[8]T. W. Craik, The Tudor Interlude (Leicester, 1962.)

[9]Trinity Square Repertory Company (Providence, R.I.) coincidentally duplicated the student conception of Death in a recent production of Ibsen's morality play, Peer Gynt.

[10]Pauline Kael, "Current Cinema: Fathers and Sons," The New Yorker, 23 December 1974, p. 66.

[11]Units of work, Spring 1974, were: Gammer Gurton's Needle--The American Dream--Zoo Story; Everyman--Death of a Salesman; Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay--Bell, Book and Candle; The Spanish Tragedy--Crime on Goat Island; Dr. Faustus--No Exit. Units of work, Fall 1974, were: The Knight of the Burning Pestle to be read as a commentary upon Renaissance theatre; 'Tis Pity She's a Whore and Gallathea to be recorded on tape. The other plays, read to be performed, were: Johan, Johan, Tyb, and the Priest Sir Johan, Everyman, Volpone, 'Tis Pity She's a Whore, and Gallathea. We used various paperback editions for ease of carrying on stage.

[12]Rhode Island College is 67-68 percent female, according to John S. Foley, Director of Admissions.

[13]In only a few instances did complications arise: for example, when the full dramatic effect of a prolonged romantic moment was prevented by the embarassment of two (female) lovers in Greene's Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay.

[14]We wish to thank Professor John J. Salesses, Director of General Studies, Rhode Island College, for his complete support and cooperation, without which our course could never have succeeded. We also thank Dr. Mark W. Estrin, Chairman of the English Department and the following members of the Speech- Theatre Department who gave us counsel, time, and also loaned us their facilities to enhance our students' work: Dr. Edward A. Scheff, Chairman; John F. Custer, Managing Director of Theatre; John M. Gavis, Instructor of Theatre and Technical Director; Barbara B. Matheson, Instructor of Theatre and Costumer; Russell J. Monaghan, Director of Roberts Auditorium. Professor Norma Kroll of Northeastern University aided us with criticism of this paper. We also wish to thank our students for teaching us with patience and for allowing us to use their work in this paper and at the meeting of the seminar, "New Strategies in Teaching Dramatic Literature," Modern Language Association of America, December, 1974, where we presented and discussed videotapes of the student performances.

Articles on new methods of teaching drama by Jackson G. Barry, Warren J. MacIsaac, Patricia K. Meszaros, J. L. Styan, and Edward Partridge appear in Shakespeare Quarterly, XXV (Spring 1974.) See also, Morris Eaves, "The Real Thing," College English XXXI (1970) 463-472.